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LAUGHING THEIR HEADS OFF: NINETEENTH-CENTURY COMIC VERSIONS OF THE BLUEBEARD TALE

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ABSTRACT

The *Blaubartmärchen* rewards study because it encodes key notions about gender, order, and the nature of fairy tale. In contrast to comic French and English traditions, the canonical German *Blaubartmärchen* is serious and tragic. However, a rich, forgotten nineteenth-century tradition of popular German Bluebeard comedies exists.

Franz von Pocci's *Kasperliade* (1859) seems to promote conservative authority structures but subtextually evokes carnivalesque subversion. Alexander von Sternberg's *Märchen* (1850) involves transgressive gender roles, indeed an (albeit very limited) deconstruction of gender, before resorting to defensive reinscription of conservative gender roles. F.W. Hackländer's realist novella (1863) seems to lack subversive moments in its denial that Bluebeard is evil, but a closer reading shows up its uneasy moments; and Roderich Benedix's play (1861) is unique in challenging the *Märchen* plot and established gender roles.

Laughter here restores order and ridicules characters who transgress; but it is also used in complex ways as an inoculation against fear. Despite seeming to share cultural and political values with texts in the canon, these comedies are nonetheless excluded because they deviate formally from the Grimmian *Märchen* and question the canonical view that *Märchen* must be ancient and serious. Given that these texts were more popular than the Grimms', a review of notions of the *Märchen*, folk and popular culture is required. Some of the texts also undermine canonical values in dangerous ways by using laughter to rob Bluebeard of his terror and power.

INTRODUCTION

In the *Blaubartmärchen*, a young woman marries a rich, older man with an unsettlingly blue beard and a history of disappearing wives. Bluebeard forbids his new wife to enter a certain room in his home, and when she succumbs to that temptation, she finds suspended inside the room the murdered, often decapitated, corpses of her predecessors. Infuriated by his bride's transgression, Bluebeard prepares to murder her too; but she is usually saved by her siblings, who kill Bluebeard. This tale rewards analysis not only because it is a *Märchen*, that is, part of a genre which has traditionally encoded key cultural messages, but because, more specifically, it has functioned as a particularly sensitive seismograph of gender relations through the modern period. And the mode – tragic or comic – in which variants of the tale are told is crucial to an understanding of what it has to tell us about such issues, and the often complex relationship of those issues with literature.

Aspects of the *Blaubartmärchen* certainly lend themselves to tragic read-

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ings, not least the compulsive repetition of violence. Yet the original Bluebeard text, Charles Perrault's 'La Barbe bleue' (1697), is a satire on contemporary mores, not a tragedy.[1] The plot is melodramatic, with the classic comedic conclusions of wealth, success and multiple marriages, for the bride makes a new match and her siblings marry too. Also comedic are the reversal of fortune and the triumph of an apparently weaker character; the breaking of a cycle of violence; and the overthrow of a tyrant. Perrault tells his *conte* with irony and wit; and it involves too the curious and grotesque, as opposed to the tragic, an evident example being the ludicrous blue beard.

Importantly, the comic features of 'La Barbe bleue' are linked to its proto-feminist features, for the ending vindicates the rights of woman and shows a lasting, liberating change in the social and family hierarchy. Such features tally with the tale's origin in the literate mixed company of French salons,[2] as opposed to the fantastic medieval patriarchy imagined by the Grimms and others. Such associations between comedy and an emancipatory message remind us that laughter has long been recognised as a force which can challenge the very order of things, by turning it on its head, or making it disappear into thin air by mocking it.[3]

But compared with the more comic English or French traditions, the consistently serious and tragic tone of the German Bluebeard canon, dominated as it is by the Grimms' 'Blaubart' (1812) and Ludwig Bechstein's 'Das Märchen vom Ritter Blaubart' (1845), is striking.[4] While these tales apparently end happily, they are less comedies than didactic narratives stressing punishment rather than utopian change, inculpating the women and subtly exculpating the abuse of masculine authority.[5] It seems that the nineteenth century's concern to establish bourgeois moral standards on the model of the patriarchal nuclear family was no laughing matter. Thus, an early twentieth-century commentator on Franz von Pocci's comedy 'Blaubart. Ein furchtbares Spektakelstück aus dem finstern Mittelalter' (1859), for instance, could identify the Bluebeard material as 'geheimnisvoll düster', and the introduction of comedy by a clown figure

[1] Charles Perrault, 'La Barbe bleue' (1697), in *Contes*, ed. Marc Soriano, Paris 1989, pp. 257–62.
[2] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, London 1994, pp. 249–52.
[3] The classic account of subversive carnival laughter is Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, Cambridge, Mass. 1968; or from a feminist point of view, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Manchester 1986, e.g. pp.32–3.
[4] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Blaubart' (1812), no. 62 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm. Vergrößerter Nachdruck der zweibändigen Erstausgabe von 1812 und 1815*, ed. Heinz Rölleke and Ulrike Marquardt, Göttingen 1986, I, pp. 285–9; Ludwig Bechstein, 'Das Märchen vom Ritter Blaubart' (1845), in *Deutsches Märchenbuch*, ed. Hans-Heino Ewers, Stuttgart 1996, pp. 374–7.
[5] Cf. Hartwig Suhrbier, 'Blaubart - Leitbild und Leidfigur', in *Blaubarts Geheimnis: Märchen und Erzählungen, Gedichte und Stücke*, ed. Hartwig Suhrbier, Cologne/ Düsseldorf 1984, pp. 11–79, here pp.24–5; Mererid Puw Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard in German Literature from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Oxford 2001, pp. 118–31.

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as a novelty, stating: 'Das Grauenvolle, das dem Stoff anhaftet, ist durch die Einfuehrung Kasperls erheblich gemildert.'[6] In the twentieth century, the German Bluebeard became even more tragic in tone, with bleak texts like Max Frisch's novella 'Blaubart' (1984) increasingly obscuring the happy ending. Commentary, too, on the German *Blaubartmärchen* has largely ignored comedy.[7]

However, a forgotten, German, comic Bluebeard tradition does exist. It includes Ludwig Tieck's play *Ritter Blaubart* and his prose text, *Die sieben Weiber des Blaubart* (both 1797); L[ouis] Angely's 'Herr Blaubart oder das geheimnisvolle Kabinett. Posse in einem Akt, frei nach dem französischen' (1828); Armand Vestris's *Blaubart. Großes romantisch-pantomimisches Ballett in drei Abtheilungen* (1832); Pocci's poem 'Blaubart' (1845) and 'Blaubart. Ein furchtbares Spektakelstück aus dem finstern Mittelalter' (1859); Alexander von Sternberg's *Märchen* 'Blaubart' (1850); Roderich Benedix's 'Blaubart. Lustspiel in zwei Aufzügen' (1861); F.W. Hackländer's novella 'Der Blaubart' (1863); E[ugenie] Marlitt's novella 'Blaubart' (1866); Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's short story 'Ein harmloser Blaubart' (1873); and F[riedrich] P[aul] von Westenholz's *Lustspiel* 'Blaubart' (1895).[8] There are compelling reasons for studying these texts and asking why they should have been so forgotten, most notably because they were genuinely popular. As such, they not only illuminate gender relations in the nineteenth century, but also cast new light on 'Blaubart', and the *Märchen*, comedy, popular culture and their possibilities in general.

DANGEROUS BLUEBEARDS

Franz Graf von Pocci, 'Blaubart. Ein furchtbares Spektakelstück aus dem finstern Mittelalter' (1859)

Pocci's *Kasperlkomödie* is set in a fantastical Middle Ages where the *Raubritter* Blaubart elopes with Berta. In Blaubart's castle, Berta opens the forbidden chamber, but is saved by her sister Anna, Kasperl, and the knight

[6] Georg Schott, *Die Puppenspiele des Grafen Pocci. Ihre Quellen und ihr Stil* (Ph.D. thesis, Munich 1911), Frankfurt a.M. 1911, p. 18.

[7] Exceptions are Suhrbier; Winfried Menninghaus, *Lob des Unsinns: Über Kant, Tieck und Blaubart*, Frankfurt a.M. 1995.

[8] Alexander von Sternberg, 'Blaubart' (1850), in *Braune Märchen*, Bonn 1977, pp. 127–39; Armand Vestris, *Blaubart. Großes romantisch-pantomimisches Ballett in drei Abtheilungen*, Berlin 1832; Franz Graf von Pocci, 'Blaubart. Ein furchtbares Spektakelstück aus dem finstern Mittelalter in drei Aufzügen' (1859), in *Franz Poccis sämtliche Kasperkomödien*, Munich 1909, I, pp. 95–126; Roderich Benedix, 'Blaubart. Lustspiel in zwei Aufzügen', *Die deutsche Schaubühne*, 7 (1861), 2–27; Friedrich Wilhelm Hackländer, 'Der Blaubart', *Über Land und Meer*, 10, nos 38, 39, 40 (1863), 593–5, 609–11, 625–7. Further references appear in the text. Full bibliographical details are available in Suhrbier and/or Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*. To discuss all these texts falls beyond the scope of this essay which focuses on both exceptional and representative examples not examined elsewhere in secondary literature. On Tieck, see Menninghaus; on Angely, Suhrbier pp.46–7; on Marlitt, Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*, pp. 132–61.

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Hugo von Hohenfels, whom Berta marries. With Kasperl, the play invokes a long tradition of entertainment involving clowns and fools. An important strand in that tradition involves the notion of the fool as a subversive character who challenges social hierarchies, norms and codes, being the lower-class representative of bodily and unconscious drives, and the anarchic power of laughter and carnival.[9] However, Richard Sheppard points out that Pocci's Kasperl embodied a particular evolution of the fool figure during the nineteenth century in Germany, whereby precisely that subversive potential was constrained:

> the anti-authoritarian, proletarian descendant of Dionysos, Mr. Punch, was […] either transformed into the (miniaturised) hero of a bowdlerised children's entertainment, […] or diabolised […] or rendered more socially acceptable by being turned into tamer figures like Pocci's Kasperl.[10]

At first sight, Pocci's play indeed seems to accord with the conservative Catholic author's project of providing inoffensive children's entertainment.[11] That conservative intention is particularly evident with regard to a woman's role, thematised in the first dialogue between Berta and the more conventional and obedient Anna, who attempts to teach her sister more proper behaviour:

> Anna. Du liest dir noch die Augen heraus; das ewige Lesen! Es kann dir nicht gut sein!
> Berta. Schwester, laß mich! Es gibt nichts Schöneres, Reizenderes als die alten Ritterromane. Ach, wenn mich nur so ein Ritter entführen wollte! (p.104)

Berta indicates that she is both foolish and potentially masochistic, and therefore to blame for her own impending predicament. It is especially interesting that these qualities are intimately linked with her reading, clearly identified here as a damaging influence. Anna's odd expression 'Du liest dir noch die Augen heraus' hints not only at the literal dismemberment with which Blaubart threatens Berta, but at the disfiguring, figurative blindness which literacy brings to women. In short, Berta transgresses the appropriate feminine role by indulging her intellectual,

[9] Cf. e.g. Karl Riha, 'Kaspers Wiederkehr: vom Grafen Pocci zu H.C. Artmann', in *Kasperletheater für Erwachsene*, ed. Norbert Miller and Karl Riha, Frankfurt a.M. 1978, pp. 425–39; Manfred Nobel, 'Kasperl Redivivus? Zur lustigen Figur bei Franz Pocci', in Pocci, *Kasperls Heldentaten. Neunzehn Puppenkomödien und Kasperliaden*, ed. Nobel, Berlin, DDR 1981, pp. 6–36; Richard Sheppard, 'Upstairs - Downstairs - Some Reflections on German Literature in the Light of Bakhtin's Theory of Carnival', in *New Ways in Germanistik*, ed. Richard Sheppard, Oxford 1990, pp. 278–315; Reinhard Valenta, *Franz von Poccis Münchener Kulturrebellion: Alternatives Theater in der Zeit des bürgerlichen Realismus*, Munich 1991.
[10] Sheppard, p. 302. Further references appear in the text.
[11] Cf. Riha, p. 426.

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imaginative life, such that a commentator in 1911 could compare her unfavourably with 'ihre natuerlicher empfindende Schwester'.[12]

Not only is Berta literate, she is also highly articulate, being apart from Kasperl the play's most talkative character. She muses, regarding the prohibited room:

> Ich werde gewiß stets meine Pflichten als Gattin streng erfüllen; ob es aber auch zu ihnen gehört, Launen und Willkür zu ertragen, das ist wohl sehr die Frage. […] es ist […] eine Tyrannei meines Mannes, die ich am ersten Tage unserer Ehe […] nicht dulden *darf*; denn wie ging's dann weiter mit mir? Seine Tyrannei würde zunehmen von Tag zu Tag und ich wäre dann bald nicht mehr Blaubarts Gattin, sondern seine Sklavin. […] Es ist wirklich schändlich, wie [die Männer] uns Frauen behandeln! Gerade, als wenn wir nur Mägde wären. (pp.117—18)

But such apparently consistent reflections are undermined by the presentation of Berta's judgements as dubious. And because Berta's argument moves from the particular to the general ('die Männer', 'uns Frauen'), this speech mocks emancipatory rhetoric on the part of women. Thus, Berta's characterisation discredits feminine articulacy as well as literacy. By contrast, once Berta has opened the chamber, both her faith in her cognitive powers and her language break down: 'Wie ist mir! War's ein Traum?' (p.188). Subsequently, she barely speaks coherently. That is, Berta is divested of her status as a speaking and, implicitly, reasoning being. If Berta's speech patterns are an index of her moral character and autonomy, the silence imposed on her goes hand in hand with the correction of the former and the limitation of the latter, in preparation for a more conventional marriage with Hugo.

In line with her intellectually transgressive nature, Berta seems morally suspect too. Blaubart says: 'Ha, Schlange […] Du warst ungehorsam, du warst neugierig […] Weh dir, Treulose' (pp.119–20). Blaubart's words allude to God's pronouncements in the Garden of Eden, but in his account, the woman is doubly evil, both Eve and serpent, a shift which obscures Bluebeard's role as the real tempter. And while the villainous Bluebeard's words are not necessarily credible, they are subtly confirmed by other features in the play. For instance, Berta's moral status is undermined by her illicitly and voluntarily leaving her father's protection, and by the most extraordinary fact that Blaubart's and Berta's wedding ceremony is never mentioned, so that Berta seems to be living in sin. Most importantly, Kasperl elaborates a valedictory moral: 'Diese Geschicht' ist

[12] Schott, p. 21. While in European literature at large, it is not only women characters who are likely to be misled by inappropriate reading (Cervantes's Don Quixote is a case in point) the German *Märchen* tradition in general and the *Blaubartmärchen* in particular seek to discredit especially the feminine quest for knowledge, which is often associated with literacy. This view is borne out by the strikingly consistent gendered use of the motif of reading and writing in the texts discussed here.

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zwar gut ausgegangen; aber wer weiß, was ein andermal geschieht, wenn man der Neugierd' nicht widerstehen kann! Nehmen S' Ihnen's zur Lehr'' (pp.125–6). Kasperl is reproducing Blaubart's view that women's curiosity is the real vice displayed in the play, not serial murder; but unlike Blaubart, Kasperl is the audience's interlocutor and a figure of identification whose statements direct the audience's responses. In other words, while Bluebeard is dead, his moral judgement lives on.

With this statement, Kasperl seems to support a stabilising, conservative message. Indeed, while Kasperl leaves a door open for Hugo to come and rescue Berta, and thus maintains the audience's affections, his position throughout is ambivalent with regard to his mistress. Kasperl's part in Berta's predicament is not innocent, for it is ultimately he who persuades her to open the chamber:

> Kasperl: […] Was ist denn das für ein wundernettes goldnenes Schlüsserl? Das gehört g'wiß zum Geldkasten, wo die Dukaten drinliegen.
> Berta: Das ist der einzige Schlüssel, von dem ich keinen Gebrauch machen darf.
> Kasperl: […] Ja, warum hat ihn nachher der g'streng' Herr Ritter nit lieber in sei'm Gilettaschl b'halt'n?
> Berta: Das ist *seine* Sache, er *will* es einmal so.
> Kasperl: […] Das hielt ich nit aus, wenn ich den Schlüssel dazu hätt'! So, jetzt machen S' was wollen. G'hörsamer Diener. (Ab).
> Berta: Eigentlich hat Kasperl so unrecht nicht. (pp.116–17)

Kasperl's intervention catalyses Berta's transgression and thus, Kasperl replicates Blaubart's role as tempter.

And Kasperl's ostensibly sympathetic responses to Berta's predicament are at best limited, and at worst passively complicit with Blaubart. He says:

> Jetzt heißt's aber den Kopf hängen! Arme Berta! […] – Ich lauf davon! Das heißt: ich tät's, wenn ich könnt, aber der Kerl laßt mich nit fort; eher schlagt er auch mich noch tot, wie er's seiner Frau angekündigt hat. Sein großes Ritterschwert hab' ich ihm schon schleifen müssen heut. (p.121)

Kasperl's thoughts are less of rescuing Berta, or joining the sisters in resisting the man who is oppressing all parties, than of fear for his own position. Therefore, while Kasperl and Blaubart might at first sight appear to be opposites, in fact Kasperl's behaviour subtly echoes Blaubart's, so that the supposedly tame, sympathetic clown affirms the abuse of patriarchal authority practised by Blaubart. The message therefore is that social order is not to be disrupted, either by a wife's disobedience, or a servant's insubordination. Berta is indeed like a 'Magd' and Blaubart can only be challenged by his social equal and fellow man Hugo, who will control Berta in future.

And yet, a more complex reading is possible, for the play remains part of that clowning tradition which has an ambivalent relationship with the

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dominant order.[13] Kasperl's traditional role of undermining and mocking high culture and authority is muted here, but vestigially present in the mockery of Berta, and with her, of a whole aristocratic class which has leisure to indulge in reading, marrying and murder, while Kasperl must submit to the tyranny of that class in order to keep body and soul together. As is typical of such figures, the downtrodden Kasperl is concerned with eating, drinking and survival, rather than escape or overthrowing the tyrant. As a result, he is an amoral character, unconcerned, and thus implicitly in conflict, with the lofty moral values associated with many nineteenth-century *Märchen*.

And despite Kasperl's alignment with authoritarian values, he simultaneously and paradoxically fulfils a disruptive role. As Berta's tempter, Kasperl reproduces Blaubart's role and authoritarianism; yet that temptation provokes the incursion into the text of rampant, demonic vices and desires. Kasperl's intervention prompts, too, Berta's feminist reflections, and her transgression of gender roles. In other words, Kasperl catalyses the brief challenge to authority which occurs when Berta appropriates Blaubart's phallic key (albeit a diminutive challenge, given the play's stabilising treatment of both the clown and the Bluebeard material, a domestication which is symbolised by the little key, 'das kleine goldene Schlüsselchen' (p.114), in contrast to the expressively large key often imagined by illustrators of other Bluebeard texts). Kasperl introduces disorder in other ways too, for example in his typical 'blödeln' or distortion of language:

> Blaubart: Du sollst mir eine Braut holen.
> Kasperl: 's Kraut soll ich holen? (p.102)

In the first instance, Kasperl is mocking his superior's speech, but there are other implications here too. By consistently reducing authoritarian language to nonsense, Kasperl is interfering with the common, and culturally weighty, perception of language as a transparent, normative vehicle of communication, power and authority.[14]

It is also possible that the text is undermining high culture on a generic level. What is evident here is, *inter alia*, interference between two powerfully recognisable genres, the *Märchen* and the *Kasperliade*; or more precisely, the subordinating and undermining of the former by the latter. For instance, for Berta and the other *Märchen* characters, the plot ends with the strong closure (death, marriage) frequently associated with the *Märchen*. However, while Kasperl too has been liberated from Blaubart, he is not affected by that closure. Viewers know that the play belongs in a series of *Kasperliaden*, and expect Kasperl to proceed to further, open-ended adventures. That lack of closure is part of the play's limited satire

[13] Cf. Valenta, who emphasises the subversive and carnivalesque in Pocci's plays.
[14] Cf. Valenta, p. 145.

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on the upper classes, since it implies that happy endings are luxuries unavailable to the servant. Moreover, closure in *Märchen* is often associated with social and symbolic stabilisation. For example, the Grimms' 'Blaubart' closes firmly with the permanent disenfranchisement of the potentially disorderly heroine and the desirable re-establishment of patriarchal authority.[15] By contrast, the fact that the closure of this *Kasperliade* is patently temporary holds open the possibility of a recurrence of disruption in a manner which contradicts the crucial closure of the Grimmian version and perhaps, subtly, the values associated with it.

Finally, the process of performing this play would relativise the printed text's apparently more rigid, serious statements. Above all, the puppets constitute a 'Verfremdungseffekt'. The physical threats take on a different value, become more grotesque, comic even, than sinister, since they are not perpetrated on human bodies. Moreover, just as Kasperl's 'blödeln' challenges the rational language which seems to guarantee the order of things, the puppets too challenge another guarantor of the stable world. Sheppard argues that for a certain middle-class, cultural milieu in nineteenth-century Germany, clown figures were implicitly problematic, since they may be read as becoming, on a deep and non-conscious level,

> offensive to bourgeois culture because, far from being characters in the individualistic sense, they were masks, types, insolent reminders of the illusory nature of the individualised bourgeois ego and its claim to exercise control, and, conversely, pointers to the raw power of the primitive, pre-individualised roots of the human personality. […] Where folly appears, the bourgeois ego is made aware of its fragility (p.303).

This statement would be doubly true of clowning marionettes.[16] Thus, while Pocci's bowdlerised Kasperl does not have the Dionysian power to invoke any alternative, carnivalesque, sense of being, his presence hints at the fragility of the modern subject at which the morals of the Grimm *Märchen* were aimed.

In conclusion then, Pocci's *furchtbares Spektakelstück* contains mixed messages. This play apparently fits neatly into that nineteenth-century Bluebeard tradition which sought to cement bourgeois patriarchal social norms. However, the play carries vestiges too of other traditions which,

[15] Cf. Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*, pp. 118–25.

[16] The fascinating ambiguities which result from allowing puppets or other non-human actors to play out the moral scenarios of 'Blaubart' - on the one hand, the imagery of violence and authority can be exaggerated dramatically, on the other, it is undermined - help account for the general popularity of presenting 'Blaubart' in non-realist media. Examples include Georg Trakl's puppet play of 1910; Alexandre Boubnov's animation *La dernière femme de Barbe-bleu* (France, 1996); Henk Schut's adult puppet play *Bluebeard*, Little Angel Theatre, London, 1999; the shadow-puppet version of 'Barbe-bleue' shown at Gilles de Rais's (a putative historical Bluebeard) castle in Tiffauges, France, 2001; Thomas Mierau's puppet play versions, including *Der Blaubart*, Theater Mirakulum, Berlin, 2001.

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while they do not favour the woman protagonist, none the less destabilise values traditionally linked with *Märchen*.

Alexander von Sternberg, 'Blaubart' (1850)

In this text, Blaubart marries and disposes of seven sisters. When the eighth sister, Suse, is put to the test of the forbidden chamber, she finds in it not only her imprisoned sisters, but more unusually, her husband's cosmetics, glass eyes, false teeth and so forth, which had given him the deceptive impression of being a 'vollkommenster Kavalier', an epithet which is even inscribed on the walls of his castle. Suse literally unmasks Bluebeard as a fraud, and the sisters are rescued by their father. Initially, this text challenges masculine authority in unusual ways; and subsequently, it reasserts it.

Suse is a far more resolute heroine than is usual in the nineteenth-century *Blaubartmärchen*. She intends to find out the truth about her sisters' disappearance, but also enjoys the material benefits of her marriage, unconcerned with the moral and sentimental obligations on which the high nineteenth-century tradition insisted. She is brave, quick-witted, and has moral fortitude, for she shows no sign of submitting to the allegedly feminine vice of curiosity, entering the room due not to a lack of self-control, but to reasoned detective work. And Suse does not attempt to hide her transgression, as is invariably the case in this tradition, but rather, paints out the inscriptions describing 'der vollkommenste Kavalier' and openly challenges her husband on his return.

As in Pocci's play, language and writing are sites of gendered contest. Traditionally, Bluebeard's chamber contains his secret knowledge, that is, privileged knowledge, and therefore power. Here, Blaubart claims that his chamber contains books and papers. In other words, that claim hints that written texts embody the secret of patriarchal power. Suse explodes that power by showing it to be illusory (there are no books and papers), and divesting it of secrecy in a very public, explicit way by vandalising the inscriptions, although she does not seem to be capable of appropriating the power of writing for herself.

Not only does Suse defy conventional expectations of womanhood, and therefore seem potentially threatening, but the tale's treatment of Blaubart is even more startling. Suse discovers that Blaubart has not just one secret, but two: the abuse of women, and the use of cosmetics, and it is the latter which seems to outrage her most. Blaubart's major crime is his deviation from conventional masculinity, so that what is truly horrifying about him is less his cruelty than his effeminacy. Thus, Sternberg's 'Blaubart' makes explicit the sub-text of gender trouble implicit in the *Blaubartmärchen*, whereby the woman's appropriation of the keys can be understood as an act of mimetic rivalry which undermines clear gender roles. The shocking secret of Bluebeard's chamber is no longer murder committed on stereotypically gendered models, but the instability of apparently

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reliable gender identity, and the revelation that Blaubart's masculinity, which seems at first sight natural, is (in part at least) a masquerade.[17]

But such revelations are followed by a call to order. Suse is unable to resist physically or verbally as soon as Bluebeard utters a threat. Suse's sisters too are paralysed, despite the fact that the women outnumber Blaubart by eight to one. It is only the arrival of the women's father which saves them, and it is he who takes Bluebeard's fortune. The text closes with the sisters' stereotypical wish to gossip about the event: 'Verschweigen! riefen alle achte mit einer Stimme; unmöglich Papa! Das ist ja eben unsre Genugtuung, daß wir alles, was uns geschehen, und was uns nicht geschehen, in der Nachbarschaft haarklein erzählen können.' (p.139) The women's account is described as lies ('"ausbündig [...] lügen"'), despite the reality of their experience. It seems that Suse's detective work has set in train a disruption so strong that accounts of it must be equally strongly discredited. The threat here is eightfold, for we have eight unmarried (and therefore potentially less controllable) women with shocking stories to tell, and who must be ridiculed in a manner which recalls Pocci's discrediting of Berta's articulacy.

In its light tone, doggerel verse and absurd events, this tale mocks the serious moral tone and darker content of canonical versions *à la* Grimm. The text contains, too, some echo of the subversive carnival spirit latent in Pocci's text, in the slipping of gendered boundaries, and with them, hierarchies. Not only is Suse an unusual heroine, it is unprecedented in this tradition for Bluebeard's masculinity to be questioned. In other words, the *Märchen* drops subversive hints about gender roles, indeed, gender itself. However, the text ultimately reacts to the profound threat to order involved in such suggestions by reasserting conventional stereotypes and strictures.

ILLUSORY BLUEBEARDS

Friedrich Wilhelm Hackländer, 'Der Blaubart' (1863)

One distinctive strand in the nineteenth-century German Bluebeard tradition proves that Bluebeard's secret, or even his very existence, is a fiction.[18] Such texts are generally given a contemporary, realist, setting. In Hackländer's novella the unmarried Sophie develops suspicions regarding her new brother-in-law Bärenberg, when her sister Elise mentions in a letter to her family that she is forbidden entry into one room in her husband's house, and subsequently stops writing. Sophie becomes convinced

[17] Wth this horrific possibility, Sternberg's text prefigures many distinctively modern Bluebeard texts of the early twentieth century which thematise an endangered masculinity. See Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*, pp. 162–201.

[18] Cf. Suhrbier, pp. 46–52; Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*, pp. 132–61. Other comedies in this strand are those by Angely, Marlitt, Sacher-Masoch and Westenholz.

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that Bärenberg-Bluebeard has murdered Elise; but it is finally revealed that Elise had stopped writing due to pregnancy and confinement, and that the secret room was a nursery, kept secret from her as a surprise until her son's birth. As a practical joke, in order to punish Sophie for her slanderous thoughts, Bärenberg imprisons her and leads her to think that she too will be murdered, but a joyful finale follows.

Hackländer's novella expresses conservative gender ideals, for example when Bärenberg discusses the forthcoming visit of his in-laws to his castle:

> Das Zimmer für den Kriegsrath [the father of Sophie and Elise] […] bestimmte Herr Bärenberg neben der Bibliothek, wo sich eine Auswahl klassischer Werke, besonders der Kriegskunde, befände […] Die Mutter […] [sollte] ihre Wohnung im Erdgeschoß haben, wo [sie] den Wirthschaftsräumen, sowie dem ansehnlichen Küchen- und Gemüsegarten nahe wäre. (no. 38, p. 594)

That is, Bärenberg's library is masculine territory, and the kitchen feminine. Sophie looks forward to her visit as follows:

> Auch sah sie sich wohl auf der Zinne des alten Wartthurms sitzend, und versetzte sich träumend in jene Zeit zurück, wo das zarte Burgfräulein dort geharrt tagelang […] 'Doch würde ich nie da oben sitzen,' dachte Sophie, 'ohne Geibel's Gedichte bei mir zu haben,' diesen Seelentrost für junge und alte verliebte Mädchenherzen. (*ibid.*)

This fantasy is derived from reading, implicitly characterised as inferior to that available in the library. The illegitimacy of Sophie's reading is stressed too by the marginal, exposed position outside the domestic interior. Indeed, this location illustrates the spinster's position as an outsider to the bourgeois family; and the symbolic impossibility of the intellectual woman's obtaining a room of her own.

The relationship of woman and language is discredited too because Sophie's suspicions are bolstered by a talkative old woman servant, a figure who in the nineteenth century was often responsible for demonised narrative.[19] Thus the name Sophie, which in the classical tradition suggests wisdom, becomes ironic. So despite the fact that Sophie is true to her name and uses her reason critically, she is ridiculed. And as in Pocci's play, an excess of feminine imagination goes hand in hand with feminist polemic. Sophie says: 'O, diese Männer! Keiner hat ein Herz, selten ist einer im Stande, das zarte Gemüth eines weiblichen Wesens zu verstehen, und es schonend, wie es sein soll, zu behandeln' (no. 39, p. 611). Here too, a connection is made between foolishness and feminine use of literacy, language and emancipatory argument.

Elise, however, is Sophie's idealised opposite, progressively moving away from the sphere of literacy and language as she embarks on marriage and

[19] Cf. Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*, pp. 18–33.

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motherhood. Indeed, it is the fact that Elise stops practising literacy by no longer writing letters that provokes Sophie's suspicions in the first place. Sophie says:

> 'Elise, […] die so gerne schreibt, meine starke und gesunde Schwester, sollte in wenigen Monaten so weit herunter gekommen sein, daß es ihr Mühe macht, die Feder zu halten,' […] Die Kriegsräthin […] gab […] ihrer Tochter zur Antwort: 'Es gibt Dinge, die man Dir bei Deinem gewiß nicht kleinen Verstande dennoch nicht genügend erklären kann'. (no. 40, p. 626)

Feminine 'Verstand' is shown to be useless and blind. And at the end of the novella, Elise says: 'Ich bin […] namenlos glücklich' (no. 40, p. 627). Not only is Elise no longer literate, the adjective 'namenlos' suggests that she is altogether becoming inarticulate.

By contrast, Bärenberg's very name suggests power, strength and a natural, positively connotated aggressiveness. Bärenberg is a 'Direktor und Mitbetheiligter eines großen Hammer- und Schmiedewerks in einem reizenden Thale des Gebirgs' (no. 38, p. 594), that is, in the vanguard of a masculinised, technological, capitalist and phallic ('Hammer') progress which is driving back the frontiers of the wild, represented by that Freudian symbol of the unconscious, and of feminine nature, the wooded valley, the physical opposite of the factory.[20] Just as Hackländer describes the authority of the husband in a bourgeois marriage as natural, the work of the factory and its setting too are presented in harmonising, naturalising terms: 'der vielstimmige Gesang der lustigen gefiederten Waldsänger […] – zwischen diesen Harmonieen klang als Grundbaß das Rauschen der Mühlwerke und das Klappern der Streckhämmer' (no. 39, p. 609).

Bärenberg's home too is a physical correlative of his masculine power, containing not only a library, but also a phallic tower in which the forbidden room is located and Sophie imprisoned. The suggestion is that the tower is the locus of Bärenberg's power, and that women cannot enter except as prisoners or mothers, that is, until they have taken up a subordinate place in a patriarchal order. Once Elise has given birth to Bärenberg's son, she says:

> 'das Zimmer hier war schon für mich und den Kleinen eingerichtet, lange vorher, ehe ich es wissen durfte – das verstehst Du doch, Sophie?'
>
> Nun sind wir freilich nicht ganz überzeugt, ob Sophie das vollkommen verstand, aber sie war klug genug, zu thun, als habe sie verstanden (no. 40, p. 627)

Elise is expressing joyful submission to a law ordained by her husband which she is only allowed to grasp once she has entered the state of motherhood. The spinster Sophie is not in a position to understand that

[20] Cf. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, New York 1983.

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law, for she can only think intellectually, a process which does not allow her understanding of the situation to be 'vollkommen'. The implication is that the independent use of reason is inferior to an intuitive mode of understanding available only to a woman who has fulfilled the high purpose of marriage and motherhood (which involves submission and the loss of independence).

The implication is that Sophie must be punished for her vivid imagination and reading; and that any doubts as to the benefits of marriage and motherhood for a young woman must be the product of ignorance and superstition. In other words, Hackländer apparently demystifies fantasies of marriage and childbirth as being dangerous to young women. As such, he is affirming the order represented by Bärenberg. Given which, it is difficult to identify subversive aspects in this text. However, it may be that in seeking to cover over fear and danger, Hackländer inadvertently reveals the darker side of Bärenberg's order. The withdrawal of Elise from society and articulacy into the chamber of motherhood, where she can no longer communicate with her worried sister, is funereal. And while Elise does return alive, it is no longer as a reasoning being, but as a passive body. And perhaps the characterisation of Sophie as being 'klug genug' not to challenge the patriarchal family structure may be read in more than one way. While that characterisation, on one level, suggests that Sophie, too, acquiesces in the family hierarchy, it might also be read, against the grain, as a hint that in fact Sophie recognises some more ominous truths about the situation which she dares not speak. In other words, the novella's impact is complex. On the one hand, it teaches women submission by use of subtle threat; on the other, it may be that the emergence of a happy ending, seemingly against the odds, would have served the purpose not (only) of imposing order by showing how quiescent women are rewarded; but also of reassuring them, in the face of the very real dangers of confinement, that women may yet get away unscathed.

An exception: Roderich Benedix, 'Blaubart' (1861)

Benedix's *Lustspiel* contrasts sharply in its treatment of gender roles with the texts discussed so far. Here, the young bridegroom Arnold brings his bride Hermine home. They meet Arnold's former tutor Wander, who warns Arnold that all women are deceitful and unfaithful. Wander and Arnold arrange a test for Hermine whereby she is forbidden entry to one room in his house. If Hermine fails this test, Arnold will have to abandon her. The next-door neighbour is Hermine's old friend, the beautiful, clever and confident Rosamunde. Rosamunde is now engaged to Leonhard, Hermine's brother, who is unjustly jealous. Rosamunde discovers the plan against Hermine and is shocked at its pettiness and double standard. Rosamunde in turn, then, engineers a test of curiosity to entrap Arnold and Wander, and Leonhard too, in order to correct his jealousy by showing it to be unfounded. Therefore, when Hermine walks into the men's

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trap, and is cruelly treated by them, Rosamunde is able to expose the men as equally curious, but also as hypocrites. However, the moral which she extracts from the story is less judgmental, and more liberal and generous than the one proposed by Pocci's Kasperl: 'Merkt Euch die Lehre. Wird nur der rechte Köder aufgestellt, läßt sich Jeder verlocken. […] Also nehmen Sie mich in Acht!' (p.27).

While Hermine is an innocent like Elise, the charming and kind Rosamunde is the opposite of the negative stereotypes which Hackländer was to unite in Sophie two years later. Unlike Sophie, she understands the ways of the world better than those around her; and is materially independent, as yet unmarried, and highly intelligent. While Sophie's desire to rescue her sister proved misplaced, and Berta's feminist rhetoric foolish, Rosamunde strikes a successful blow for feminine solidarity, by using precisely those media which Sophie and Berta could not deploy properly: language and written text. Rosamunde precipitates her intrigue by writing Arnold a note, and tempts the antiquarian Wander with valuable manuscripts and letters. And Wander's submission to this temptation undermines the link between text, intellectualism and masculine authority which Hackländer presented as positive and natural.

Strikingly, the denouement takes place in Rosamunde's own house. Without exception, nineteenth-century (and most later) Bluebeard texts take place in the husband's home, underlining his legal and material authority. Here, however, Rosamunde brings all the characters into her house and says: 'Mir steht hier die Gerichtsbarkeit zu' (p.26). This shift is extraordinary for two main, related, reasons. First, it runs counter to the huge symbolic importance the tradition ascribes to Bluebeard's house as a symbol of his power, and to the lack of rights accorded his wives within it. Second, it challenges the real legal and material position of German wives in the nineteenth century. At a time when, by law, marriage ended a woman's status as an autonomous legal subject and her control of her own property, transferring these to her husband, Rosamunde's insistence on her rights as individual and home-owner would have seemed radical. Interestingly, according to legal codes of the time, a wife's (extremely limited) financial authority in domestic matters was known as 'Schlüsselgewalt'. 'Blaubart' itself can be read as an intriguing game with that term, and Benedix's version as a challenge to it. Indeed, not only does Rosamunde see herself as a full legal subject, but she claims the authority of a judge too, in evoking her own 'Gerichtsbarkeit' or jurisdiction.[21]

This ending represents not only a challenge to gender roles which is not immediately crushed, it also challenges generic conventions, since by hinting jokingly at possible future transgressions of her own, Rosamunde

[21] Cf. William H. Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte: Materialien zur deutschen Familie seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1983, pp. 45–60; Petra Malsbender, *Die rechtliche Stellung der Frau im ehelichen Güterrecht vom ALR zum BGB*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, especially pp.195–6 on 'Schlüsselgewaltgeschäfte'.

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ensures that the traditional closure of marriage is held open to question. The comedy certainly derives from such conventional business as intrigue and multiple entrances and exits; but from a feminist point of view too it has a more utopian aspect, suggesting liberation for women from subordinate gender roles, the possibility of successful solidarity between women, and a lack of closure – and thus, of foregone conclusions.

Or at least, so it would seem on a modern reading. In fact, the impression the play made on its contemporary audience may well have been more complex. Once the depths of mistrust between the couples have been revealed, their final reconciliations are, at best, uneasy, and at worst, a desperate self-deceit, an outcome which would have been at odds with expectations of a romantic comedy. Rosamunde's conclusion that anyone may be tempted, even after marriage, flies in the face of any essentialist notions of natural feminine virtues like fidelity. And while it can be argued that Rosamunde does not lose her status as heroine, for she has maintained the moral high ground, and that her charm, wit and devotion to Hermine preserve her attractiveness for the spectators, such a reading involves possibly over- simple assumptions about the homogeneity of the audience, and anachronistic ideas about the qualites which nineteenth-century spectators would have valued in a young lady. Rosamunde's apparent moral triumph is bought at the price of leading male characters into temptation, before exposing their weaknesses, an operation which makes her tread a fine line between the roles of heroine and (implicitly demonic) temptress. Similarly, her solidarity with Hermine shows up and deepens gender divisions, rather than occluding and idealising them, as polite nineteenth-century society expected. Or, put another way: while Rosamunde rights the injustice done to Hermine, by the standards of her time and class, she may thus be doing wrong herself.

CONCLUSION

The function of comedy

In most of these texts, in classic comic style, a state of order is disrupted and then restored. Comedy emerges too from mockery of those who do not recognise their place in that order, like Sophie or Berta. As Marina Warner puts it in a recent study of comically violent literature:

> Humour takes part in [the] making of likenessess and differences. The perception of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, is blazingly acute: 'Our laughter is always the laughter of a group … the comic will come into being […] whenever a group of men concentrate their attention on one of their number…'[22]

[22] Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock*, London 1998, pp. 328–9.

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Warner also quotes William Gass: 'Laughter is social … and the laugh is a social corrective like a curtsy or the guillotine.' With reference to Bluebeard texts, that remark is chillingly apt; laughter directed at these heroines corrects them just as Bluebeard's threat of decapitation does. As such, the laughing spectator or reader comes to be aligned with Bluebeard. Such authoritarian laughter seems to be at odds with the possibility of subversive, disorderly laughter, which is perceptible only in a domesticated manner in Pocci's play, or Sternberg's *Märchen*. It is no coincidence that these texts have a fantastic setting, suggesting that the nineteenth-century parlour in which most of the other tales are set was especially resistant to disorderly laughter.

However, it may be that comedy is playing a more complex game here, for these texts subtly reveal precisely those disturbances and fears which the ostensibly stabilising happy endings are supposed to cover over and deny. Such disturbances and fears include that of the authoritarian husband who controls the unknown world of marriage and silences his wife; or of the woman who refuses to be tamed by marriage. Or the texts may address fear of the obscure physical dangers of sexuality or childbirth which for women followed marriage; or, literally, fear of the body, a harbinger of mortality often metonymically imagined as being feminine and grotesque, like Bluebeard's grotesque display of corpses. The fear might be of the revelation of the very oppressiveness and fragility of the bourgeois institution of marriage, or the frailty of (gendered) identity itself. On the surface, the texts seek to deny such fears by making them seem ridiculous. But covertly, laughter also functions as an inoculation against fearful things, which are exposed just enough to be mocked and made harmless.

The possibility that the texts simultaneously deny and expose fear may help explain why so many of these texts are plays. Sacher-Masoch writes in the prologue to the volume of short stories which contains his theatrical tale 'Ein harmloser Blaubart' that the stage is a locus of transformation and 'Verfremdungseffekte': 'Falsch ist hier die Liebe wie der Haß, […] es gibt hinter der Rampe kein echtes Laster und keine echte Tugend. Und wenn es einmal etwas Echtes gibt in dieser Welt, wird es mindestens für falsch gehalten; denn Niemand glaubt daran.' (pp.1–2) On stage, the good husband can be laughingly transformed into Bluebeard, and then back again, and the harmless empty room into a chamber of horrors and back, just as Kasperl's inaccurate repetition of his master's orders turns them from cruelty into harmless nonsense.

Paradoxically, the stage may have been chosen, too, to deal with secret fears because of its very public nature. The scandal of the Bluebeard material lies in the fact that what is supposed to remain secret – the content of the forbidden chamber – is made visible and public. The stage is a medium in which the physically visible is of key importance, and so the fact that no gruesome secret becomes visible is a particularly effective means of denying its existence. That denial is powerfully conveyed in front

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of the largest possible group of witnesses – a theatre audience, or indeed the readership of a popular magazine. At the same time, however, the audience's awareness that the stage is an artificial world, as Sacher-Masoch reminds us, allows a *frisson* and serves as a reminder that perhaps, like Bluebeard's wife, the spectator is not seeing everything.

The relation of the texts to the canon

There are evident similarities in plot and setting between the first group of texts discussed here and the canonical versions of the Grimms and Bechstein. But the second group of contemporary, realist comedies is more noticeably distinct from the canonical texts, in changing the settings, genre and plot, and most of all, in making Bluebeard vanish. At first sight, it seems that such texts in which Bluebeard disappears constitute a serious challenge to the values of the canonical texts. In fact, however, they can be read as a logical extension of the canonical tendency of exculpating Bluebeard, a necessary move in the German nineteenth century with its advocacy of the bourgeois patriarchal nuclear family.[23] Such texts reveal not the end of Bluebeard, but his transformation into more subtle, contemporary forms.

This development corroborates what Norbert Elias called the 'process of civilisation', whereby the modern state and the modern subject emerged in tandem, and whereby social control came to be enforced by the internalisation of control by the individual, as opposed to physical control by society's rulers.[24] Therefore, Bluebeard need no longer exist in person in order to control women, because he lives on in Sophie's mind. Hackländer describes Elise's and Bärenberg's son as 'der kleine Blaubart', the heir not only to Bärenberg's wealth, but also to the psychosocial order his father represents. It is no concidence either that the baby is also described as a future, masculine, pillar of the state: as a new 'Staatsbürger' (no. 40, p. 627). Thus, Bärenberg's moral standards may enforce order more powerfully than the sword; and the intellectual decapitation of women, by depriving them of language, may be as effective as physical decapitation. It seems, then, that the use of contemporary settings permits a more modern analysis of civilisation than canonical texts set in the past.

What most of these comedies have in common is that they ordain that women must submit to men, even cruel or deceptive ones, as legitimate masters. The persistent theme of language and writing is most interesting here, since these are identified as masculine property and women's use of them discredited. Such suspicion of women's language echoes through the nineteenth-century *Märchen* canon too, for instance in the Grimms' 'Blaubart'. When the heroine is under her father's tutelage, she is silent;

[23] Cf. e.g. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, 'The Face of Evil', *Fabula*, 29 (1988), 326–35.
[24] Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und Psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (1939), Frankfurt a.M. 1997.

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but once she has left that protection she becomes articulate, vicious and dangerous.[25] And the revelation in some of these texts that Bluebeard's secret does not exist helps discredit the feminine search for knowledge further, by making it doubly difficult. By being rendered invisible, Bluebeard's secret has been hidden even more safely from women. It seems, then, that most of these comedies reinscribe dominant conservative values even more emphatically than canonical texts do. However, for comedies to be excluded so thoroughly from the canon suggests that there are also distinctions between them and more canonical texts.

First, most of these texts present (near-)contemporary comedies of manners. As such, they challenge the Grimms' mystificatory, anti-modern nostalgia, for the Grimmian tradition, in its project of privileging the *Märchen*, has sought serious, purportedly ancient meanings in the form. That tradition has characterised *Märchen* not as products of the nineteenth-century imagination – which they undoubtedly were – but as ancient wisdom. Such readings have sought to elaborate deep, serious meaning from *Märchen* in order to attach appropriate *gravitas* both to the tales themselves and to the political or cultural agendas which the *Märchen* could be used to promote. These popular comedies may have offended against the need to make *Märchen* appear both ancient and serious, by making them appear modern and light-hearted.

Second, none of these texts corresponds formally to what is now imagined as the classic (but retrospectively constructed) *Märchen* model, which is monological, short, in prose, with paratactic sentences. The texts are either novellas or plays, and Sternberg's *Märchen* is linguistically most eccentric. While the texts use a broad range of comedic devices, what they share is a rejection of the diction and generic conventions of canonical *Märchen*.

Third, these comedies belong in the comic theatre and the illustrated magazine, very different types of demotic culture from that authentic, folk-narrative community imagined by the Grimms and fiercely promoted since. Therefore, these texts compete with traditional notions of popular or 'folk' culture and reveal that they are highly idealised stylisations. Thus, the fact that these texts would have been more popular than the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* at the time of their production means that a revision of the *Märchen* canon, of formal perceptions of the *Märchen* itself, and of perceptions of indigenous or popular culture at large, is called for.

Moreover, these texts may communicate more subversive messages than canonical tellings. On one hand, they seem to uphold traditional gender roles and reassert authoritarian social structures. It might be argued that the authoritarian nature of the texts is due to the very real cultural, symbolic, legal and material constraints on nineteeth-century bourgeois society. In this respect it is notable that most of these texts date from the

[25] Bottigheimer, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales*, New Haven/London 1987; Davies, *The Tale of Bluebeard*, pp. 121–2.

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period of restoration following the upheavals of 1848, which included the rise of an early feminist movement, the rhetoric of which is certainly satirised by Pocci in Berta's speech. In other words, it could be said that the popular nineteenth-century imagination was simply unable to envisage alternatives to the *status quo*, and limited to reproducing it. On the other hand, a more careful examination shows that some of these texts do, at least partially or vestigially, challenge or subvert precisely those values which they at first seem to support, by echoing the anarchy of carnival, unmasking the masquerade of gender or imagining alternative gender roles. Such mixed messages are, again, alien to the alleged simplicity of canonical *Märchen*. And more striking still is the unconventionality of Benedix's play. It proves that a more explicitly defiant, comedic rewriting of 'Blaubart' is possible, if rare. This exception demonstrates the ideological flexibility available to the imagination of popular fiction, and that established narrative paradigms, and even the law of the land, are open to literary alteration or subversion.[26] Such insights in turn allow a re-evaluation of popular culture, not as an affirmative mode of culture, but one which may hold more challenging possibilities than a higher-class avant-garde.

Finally, many of these texts may take excessive liberties with Bluebeard himself. The German *Märchen* tradition has assigned great authority and power to such dominant patriarchs as Bluebeard, even when their power is unjustly used. Bluebeard's power and authority derive from the terror he practises, but these comedies show that terror to be illusory. In Pocci's play Bluebeard is nothing but a puppet; in Sternberg's *Märchen* he is an unnatural fraud; in Hackländer's novella and many other texts, there is nothing to fear from him physically. Despite their upholding of socially stabilising messages, such as the affirmation of gender norms, the texts may simply go too far in their diminishing of Bluebeard's power to take their place in a canon which values that motif so highly. Or, expressed more pointedly: in a culture as authoritarian as that of nineteenth-century Germany, the ambivalent treatment of the authority figure here, evil as he is, may have been too audacious. For if Bluebeard's authority is not sustained by terror, there is nothing to stop such characters as Rosamunde from simply walking out of his home and setting up her own; and the traditional *Blaubartmärchen* itself from imploding.

[26] Why Benedix's play should be so exceptional seems mysterious, for his contemporary reputation was as a conservative entertainer; see Paul Lindau, 'Roderich Benedix', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze: Beiträge zur Literaturgeschichte der Gegenwart*, Berlin 1975, pp. 1–14; Adolf Große, 'Benedix - Moser - Blumenthal', *Monatsblätter für deutsche Literatur*, 8 (1903–4), 169–72. However, a contemporary remarked that Benedix sometimes wrote plays for specific actors, and so we may speculate that he may have created Rosamunde to allow a particular woman actor to shine. See Adolph Kohut, 'Roderich Benedix (Zum 100. Geburtstag). Mit ungedruckten Briefen und Tagebuchblättern', *Bühne und Welt*, 13, 1 (1910–11), 316–27 (here 318).

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